

A Little Bit Goes a Long Way

When I first read the part where in the Givology introduction where it says you can donate as little as \$5, I was a bit skeptical. These days, USD\$5 is barely enough for lunch at a local deli. However, after my first two visits to some schools here in China, I have come to better understand the struggles of rural schools and also the simple concept of how something that seems little or insignificant in the developed world can have a huge impact in rural schools.

The first school I went to was in an hour train ride away from Beijing in a city in the Hebei province. This school was an intermediate school (grades 7-9) that catered to children from the nearby villages. I went with the Rural Education group at Peking University, and I helped them coordinate with another program on campus to bring along a few international students to visit the school.



When I first arrived, the kids were taking part in physical education classes. We went on a Saturday; while the students still had classes, their day was shorter and involved more outdoor activities and free time.



We quickly bonded with the students through the (informal) national sport of China – ping pong! Above, a second year Chinese PKU student gets ready to serve.



Basketball is also a growing pastime among Chinese youth. I don't think these students had a very good impression about the French after this no-mercy block by my French friend.



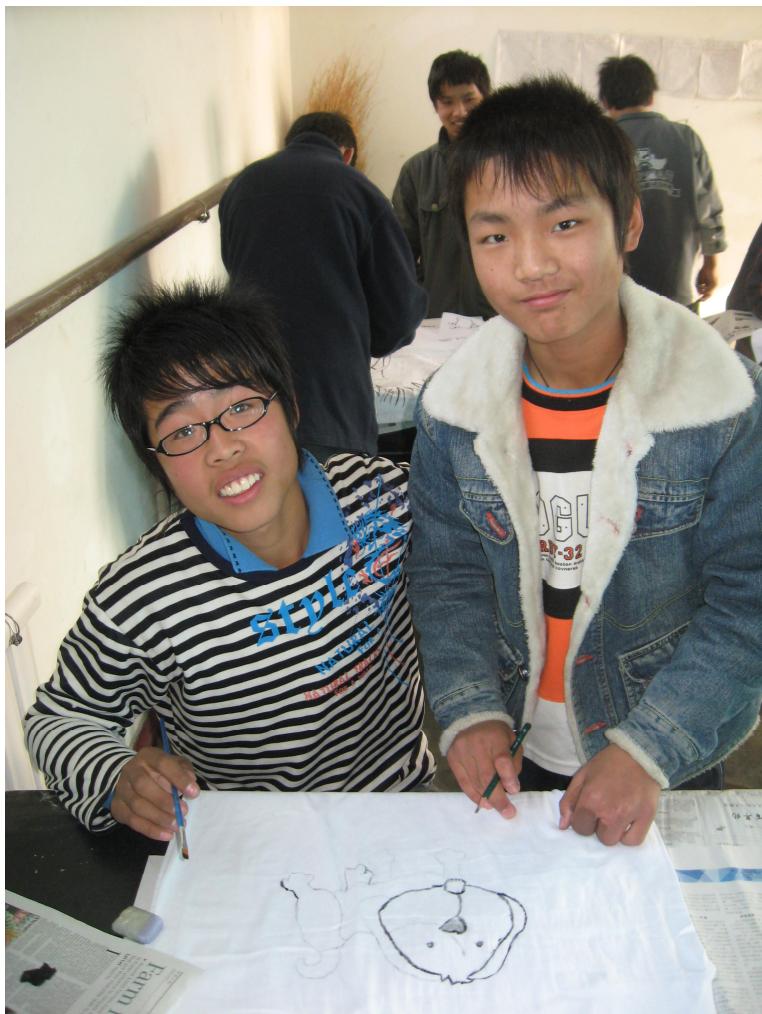
The students don't have much interaction with people outside of their villages and school. Here, my fellow student from South Korea (right) describes her experiences at Peking University and China.



The classrooms were very simple. Two students shared a desk and school materials.



That day we helped the students with arts and crafts. Their artistic abilities and attention to detail were amazing.



The student on the right's favorite subject in school is mathematics. Mathematics is one of the most useful subjects, he told me.



I tried telling these girls a bit about America, but I think something must have been lost in translation...

In the afternoon, there was a ceremony to celebrate the beginning of a partnership between the Peking University student group and this school. The students brought chairs outside to create an impromptu auditorium setting, and after listening to a few speakers from the community, there were several performances and games.







Above, one of the local students is “pleased to meet” the PKU student from Russia. There’s nothing like making new friends from afar.

Overall, my first trip to a rural school was a both a fun and enlightening experience. The way we were so enthusiastically welcomed and received by the school’s administration and students gave me a heartwarming feeling that I will always cherish. Despite the worn facilities and lack of supplies, the students seemed content with their surroundings and community.

Still, despite these many positive elements, I still saw many challenges of the rural education system. This school was supposed to be ‘well-off’ in terms of rural schools, but they still lacked enough supplies for every student. Another critical problem I saw was confidence among students. While some students were more interested and hopeful in their academic careers, others were ambivalent or even openly pessimistic about the future. “I’m just a rural student,” one student replied, when I asked him about why he didn’t think he was going to do well for the high-school entry exams. Our visit to the school was not only supposed to commemorate the partnership between the PKU group and the school, but also to remind the students of the vast world and possibilities out there for them. While these students have many challenges ahead of them, with more partnerships and support from outside, I think their potential for success is increasing.

A post (unedited) from my French friend:

I really didn't know at first we were going besides it was a school somewhere in Hebei and had no idea about what I could do to help. When I began the welcoming event I first thought "what is that ? What am I here for?" I was definitely not familiar with this kind of animations. Then the animations were going on and we were interacting more and more with the kids. I mean it was working, something was being created. I didn't see it as a superficial stuff anymore but began to enjoy it, to put myself into it. And finally when we were living some girls were crying and everybody was kind of sad. Probably if I was just arriving at this moment I would have thought "what's happening, why all this stuff for a such small thing..." But after these shared moments I understood their feelings and kind of feel sad too. At least I want to go back there. Actually at the end of the day I really felt like I learned something through these relationships with the kids, the teachers and the other Beida students.

-Jérôme Doyon, France